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## SHALL WE STUDY "THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS"?

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MARTHA HALE SHACKFORD  
Wellesley College

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Is it not true that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is being slowly but surely withdrawn from the lists of required reading in our secondary schools? Unquestionably the presence in our crowded schools of young people of widely differing religious training makes the study of this piece of Protestantism rather difficult. Moreover, we must admit that the hold of the allegory upon the fiction-sated youth of our country is very slight. They think that they are bored by Bunyan's simple and ingenuous tale; they find his language rather uncouth; his many references to the Bible have no familiar charm for this generation. Why read *The Pilgrim's Progress* when the public library is full of sophisticated, up-to-date stories? Does not many a teacher secretly share these opinions of the pupils? What is to be the fate of that volume?

Read and beloved in the past by English-speaking folk and by foreigners as well, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has had an almost unparalleled number of admirers. From Samuel Johnson to the Scotch peasants, to refer to Macaulay's almost profane antithesis, all classes in society have recognized and enjoyed in Bunyan's work the vivid descriptions, the reality of the characters, and the exciting nature of the incidents, reading the story over and over again. Surely something of this power of appeal still survives. Even more

surely, teachers can do a great deal to make pupils enjoy, understand, and appreciate the book which, to the student of literature, is a more profoundly significant one than *Paradise Lost*, or *Treasure Island*.

The more one studies English literature the more one is impressed by the fact that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is one of the most vitally natural growths and one of the most widely related literary works we possess. It is almost Homeric in binding together superstitions, the inherited code of English ethics, and the English genius for vivid, picturesque detail. Sprung from the folk, Bunyan knew the folk literature, the tales repeated by the fireside, the traditions of men and manners and faiths preserved by the unlettered as the Irish peasants have preserved their immortal legends by handing them down orally to their children's children. As *Paradise Lost* is the product of the Renaissance and illustrates the influence in England of Humanism and the New Learning, so *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the product of Mediaevalism and has roots deep in the traditions that antedate the Renaissance. Moreover, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has been itself an influence upon others, developing nobody knows how much skill and method in those who have written fiction.

In addition to its appeal as imaginative art and its significance as a link in literary history, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has extraordinary power in stimulating in its readers deep concern regarding the spiritual destiny, the ethical duties, the religious life of man. Frankly, avowedly, didactic, the book is, like *The Divine Comedy*, very far removed from the art which is only the expression of a sense of eternal beauty, the art which never seeks to persuade, or to convince by definite instruction. We have passed through a period of denying that the literature of ethical precept is literature, but mankind clings with great firmness to any work wherein vigorous spiritual conviction finds strong expression. Browning is not less ethical, nor is he, invariably, more dramatic in his method than is Bunyan. There is too much imaginative skill in *The Pilgrim's Progress* to call it merely a sermon, and too much flaming zeal for deepest truth for us to ignore it in our effort to give young people that breadth of sympathy, that power of thoughtful reflection, that

lasting stimulus to spiritual growth which should be among the results of the study of literature. No thoughtful reader can remain unmoved by the simplicity and intense fervor of Bunyan's picture of the human soul struggling to attain victory over sin in order that the beauty of holiness may be known at the end of the pilgrimage.

Can we afford to ignore this book? Is it not possible, by taking thought, to give an impetus to the interest of young readers? Cannot the teacher make himself or herself so enthusiastic over *The Pilgrim's Progress* that a certain magnetic influence will be exerted upon the pupils? Perhaps, ideally, the proper place for study of the book is in college, yet there is no real reason why the secondary schools should not give pupils more instruction than the school editions of *The Pilgrim's Progress* offer about Bunyan's relation to literary types, literary evolution, and the history of certain forms. By reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* more slowly, by studying its many relationships with other pieces of literature, pupils may come to regard it with interest and affection.

One of the first means of attracting the attention of pupils would seem to be a simple but sympathetic account of Bunyan's life. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the expression of the longings, the convictions, and the poetic visions of a uniquely interesting man who lived an active, vigorous life and was far more humanly companionable than his biographers suggest. Many a pupil, and teacher too, is daunted before beginning to read the book by the account of Bunyan, in the introduction to the text used. The average editor conscientiously does all he can to alienate the reader by giving details of Bunyan's theology and by discussing Bunyan's other works. *Grace Abounding* is invariably analyzed in such a fashion as to discourage any normal student. Is it not wiser to let the pupil discover for himself what were the religious opinions of the man whose poignantly intense spiritual life is revealed in his book? Of course pupils should be told how exclusively Bunyan read the *Bible* and Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, and that he was singularly intent upon problems of faith, but why shadow the initiation of young readers with ponderous allusions to fanaticism and dogmatic theology? The main thing is to prove that Bunyan was a real man, and it will be a rare pupil who does not feel the fascination of

Bunyan's happy, riotous boyhood given over to four specially-repented iniquities: dancing; playing tip-cat; ringing church bells out of season; and reading *Sir Beves of Southampton*. The vagabondish charm of this preacher's life in English country places has romantic kinship with the wanderings of Goldsmith and Stevenson, for Bunyan, before them, loved nature and man and freedom. Tinker, soldier, preacher, prisoner, visionary, loyal friend, and popular "bishop," Bunyan had a range of experience that brought him into contact with throbbing human life of many sorts. A comparison of the rude yet sturdy and ardent existence of Bunyan with that of the academically disciplined Milton will probably arouse in pupils a genuine curiosity to know what sort of book such a man as Bunyan would write.

Almost all readers read *The Pilgrim's Progress* too rapidly; they miss, or ignore, the wealth of detail to which Bunyan gave the verisimilitude so essential in creating the illusion of reality. Teachers should see to it that their pupils read slowly enough to give imaginative response to what they read. This is, of course, the hardest task a teacher has, but it is one of the most important in the training of youth. Few students read exactly or accurately. It seems as if much could be done to arouse enjoyment of *The Pilgrim's Progress* by having pupils begin their reading, aloud, in class. There is a stimulus, a magnetism in the atmosphere of the classroom which will quicken the interest, bring out the quaint humor, and provoke discussion. Even if all of the book cannot be read aloud, certain of the most vivid scenes should be, and, by all means, the teacher should arrange the assignments to be read at home with a view to grouping complete incidents, so that, as in the chapters of a novel, pupils will feel a certain order and method in the story. In the class-reading, every effort should be made to emphasize the vividness of background. We see in the setting of *The Pilgrim's Progress* seventeenth-century England with its stiles, its bogs, its highways, the open green fields, and sunny little villages. We recognize the faithfulness of the pictures of fairs and prisons. It may be hard to make pupils visualize this unknown world and get proper conceptions of the meaning of "wicket gate," "pillory," "stalking-horse," and other such things, but it is by such

efforts that the so-called historic imagination can be trained. In the matter of characterization, similar insistence should be placed upon noting all the details of dress, manner, speech, action, and ideas which serve to individualize the various persons of the tale. Incidents can be isolated, defined, and made distinct by asking pupils how far they suppose the incident to represent some real experience in Bunyan's own life. Of course many of the adventures are pure romance, and pupils will enjoy pointing out those which are manifestly fanciful or supernatural, and comparing them with, say, the adventures in *Ivanhoe*, the *Iliad*, or the *Aeneid*.

Step by step the allegory can be discussed, but only after the objective story has been made vivid. An allegory is double-faced and has to be dealt with somewhat artificially. The names of places and of characters betray the secret, so the symbolism should be interpreted after the first reading. The fertility of Bunyan's suggestions, the appropriateness of his characterizations, are fascinating subjects for study. How vividly we perceive the aptness of the names in the account of Temporary who lived in the town of Graceless next door to Turnback, and not far from an acquaintance named Save-self! It seems to be a help to some pupils to keep lists or tables of the allegories, having under one head names of places, such as By-path Meadow; and under another, names of objects, such as the key called Promise. These lists help to create order out of what is a sort of chaos for young readers, and, as well, make very clear the fact of Bunyan's almost exhaustless ingenuity. Lively class discussions may be provoked by asking such questions as: Is the person (or place, or object) suitably named? Does Pliable, for instance, have any other characteristic than that suggested by his name? Is the Slough of Despond a true interpretation of the experience of those who give way to melancholy and despair? Does a key successfully symbolize Promise? Such discussions inevitably quicken the interest of the pupils and also stimulate thought and later reflections. And here it may be said that the discussion of the religious harangue that somewhat deforms the latter part of the story should be rather lightly conducted. A teacher can briefly explain the terms of Calvinistic theology, such as "justification by faith," emphasizing first the fact that these

discussions by Faithful, Ignorance, and Christian are dramatic pictures of discussions very common in the seventeenth century, and emphasizing, secondly, the fact that Bunyan's story has a larger purpose than the exposition of a mere creed. Fuller talk about the distinctly religious but non-sectarian teaching can come when *The Pilgrim's Progress* is reviewed as a whole.

A review is very important, for with so complex a book there is likely to be danger of confused memories unless the teacher makes an effort to help pupils to systematize a little the opinions and the impressions they have gained. To this end, a teacher may profitably expound to a class something of the relationship *The Pilgrim's Progress* bears to other pieces of literature. Not yet are we able to speak very definitely about Bunyan's sources. Scholars have tried to prove his obligations to mediaeval French works and also to some English works, but the field, which is a fertile one for investigation, is still rather ignored. We cannot say that Bunyan was consciously a debtor to some of the works mentioned below, but it is certainly safe to point out resemblances and suggest that he has definite kinships with them, even if he is not directly descended from them.

We do know that Bunyan repented bitterly his over-vehement enjoyment of the popular *Beves of Hampton*. As a boy he read and re-read this popular romance of the youth banished from home and driven to seek his fortunes beyond the seas. *Beves* is a representative mediaeval knight-errant. He meets many adventures, fighting with Saracens, other knights, a dragon, a lion, and giants; he is imprisoned, and then released by magic; he traverses many miles in his adventures and comes eventually to his longed-for destination. Every teacher of *The Pilgrim's Progress* should read *Beves*<sup>\*</sup> and, if possible, have the pupils read it too, for the influence upon Bunyan of this romance is undeniable. He sought, perhaps unconsciously, to give his tale some of the glamor the older story had for him and for countless other English folk. The teacher who can afford the time should go farther into the subject of romances, but every teacher should explain to students that *The Pilgrim's Progress*

<sup>\*</sup> Accessible in translation by L. A. Hibbard, *Three Middle English Romances* (Scribner), and in Ellis' *Early English Metrical Romances* (Bohn).

is, in part, a romance, a type of literature extraordinarily popular during the later Middle Ages in almost all countries in Europe, the precursor of the romances of Scott, Stevenson, and other writers, and a major influence in the rise of the novel.

Whence did Bunyan derive his idea of centering his story under the guise of a pilgrimage? His own explanation in his *Apology* is too naïve to be taken as complete. A dissenter himself from the Anglican church, he turned, oddly enough, to an old custom of the Roman Catholic church for the central device of his Protestant story, although the thought that the device was decidedly Catholic probably never occurred to him. In the seventeenth century the associations with pilgrimage were entirely non-sectarian though always religious. The journey of Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury, the pilgrimage to Truth in *Piers Plowman*, and various pilgrimages in mediaeval French literature are instances of the popularity of this motif in earlier literature. Knights of romance often went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land: *Guy of Warwick* and *The Squire of Lowe Degree* illustrate this very vividly. Still more interesting, however, is a pilgrimage described in a piece of religious literature, of a type very popular in the Middle Ages, *The Purgatory of Saint Patrick*. The depicting of journeys through purgatory was a valued means of religious instruction, for some men can be terrified into virtue by pictures of the awful fate of unrepentant sinners. Lurid portrayals of a nether world and beautiful descriptions of the joys of heaven are common from Plato to Jonathan Edwards. *The Divine Comedy* is the culmination in the Middle Ages of a whole series of apocalyptic glimpses into the after life. Dante knew *The Purgatory of Saint Patrick* in some form, probably Latin, for this work appeared in many versions, surviving in prose form even in Bunyan's day. Did Bunyan know this popular piece? It may not be possible to prove it, but those who believe he had some acquaintance with it, either through hearsay or through actual reading, may be forgiven their superstitions, perhaps. At any rate, there are such interesting resemblances between *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Purgatory of Saint Patrick*<sup>1</sup> that the attention of

<sup>1</sup> Modernized versions of *The Purgatory of St. Patrick* may be found in G. P. Krapp's thesis: *The Purgatory of St. Patrick* (Baltimore); J. L. Weston's *The Chief Middle English Poets* (Houghton Mifflin Co.), and in *Legends and Satires from Mediaeval Literature* (Ginn & Co.).



pupils should be called to this popular literature of apocalyptic vision which had a vogue for hundreds of years. Owain, the hero, undertakes a journey through purgatory. He is instructed by St. Patrick, as Christian is instructed by Evangelist; he awaits, in a great hall, the coming of his ecclesiastical advisers, as Christian waits in the House of the Interpreter; he passes through mire and valleys, beset by hosts of fiends, as Christian does; he sees the Terrestrial Paradise, as Christian sees Beulah Land; he has a vision of the Celestial Paradise, as Christian has of the Celestial Country; and finally Owain, like Christian, is allowed to enter heaven. Bunyan in this seventeenth century thus keeps alive an old form of literature that is one of the most interesting in its widespread popularity, finding expression in a long line of Latin, French, and English poems, including, shall we say, Browning's "Christmas Eve and Easter Day."

The distinction between the *vision* and the *dream* was not very strict in the Middle Ages although, in general, it may be said that the vision was distinctly religious and the dream secular. The framework of the dream is used by Bunyan with careful regard for verisimilitude, although he is not as precise in giving details of place and circumstances of falling asleep as is the author of the first part of *The Romance of the Rose*, or the author of *Piers Plowman*, or Chaucer in his dream poems. Pupils ought to be led to hazard certain opinions as to the advantages of the use of the machinery of the dream, to suggest what can be included in that framework which could not be in an ordinary tale. If they are reading *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* they may enjoy the parody in Bottom's "I have had a most rare vision, I have had a dream—past the wit of man to say what that dream was." Also in the *Taming of the Shrew* the dream-motif is comparable with other literary dreams. It will not do to say that Bunyan was imitating this fashion of dreams, so dear to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century literature, but there is undoubtedly an interesting parallel to be pointed out to young students. The biblical dreams are very different from these mediaeval ones, and whatever obligation Bunyan had to the Bible in this matter is more closely related to the allegory than to the dream-framework.

Bunyan defends his use of "types, shadows, metaphors, dark figures, similitudes, and allegories" by recalling their presence in Holy Writ, but he might also have said that the tendency to allegory is inwrought with much of the Christian literature of the Middle Ages. From the time of Prudentius, of the fourth century, the Christian church has used allegory for purposes of instruction. With increasing subtlety and with more and more attention to personification and to dramatic presentation, allegory developed, from the ludicrously crude symbolism of beasts, birds, stones, architecture, and other material objects, into such sustained and varied allegories as our English masterpieces: *Piers Plowman*, *The Faerie Queene*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Absalom and Achitophel*, *The Tale of a Tub*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and, in the realm of ideal beauty, *Endymion*. Bunyan's place should be recognized as that of a link in the long chain. He is one of the most successful manipulators of this difficult medium, and one of the most gifted in the art of keeping his allegory simple, vigorous, and picturesque.

Like Dryden and Swift, Bunyan combined satire with allegory, but his satire is not as sharp and denunciatory as that of Swift. Humor is abundant in *The Pilgrim's Progress*; the clear, keen, shrewd pictures of men are gently but irresistibly real in Obstinate, By-ends, or Mr. Money-love. As a satirist Bunyan deserves praise, for his satire is almost invariably satire on character. This is a subject difficult perhaps for young pupils to appreciate, but they can be made to laugh with Bunyan over vanity, pompousness, cowardice, and hypocrisy, and to delight in the way in which Bunyan holds these traits up to ridicule. They can get some wider appreciation of satire by recalling satirical passages in the *De Coverley Papers*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and begin to form some philosophical conceptions of satire.

Looking forward now, and not backward, pupils should try to place *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the history of the development of English fiction. They may not have a very large background for comparison, but they know a few novels that will serve the purpose. Is Christian a satisfactory hero? How does he compare with Ivanhoe, Robinson Crusoe, Aeneas, Sydney Carton, in strength, courage, initiative, consideration for others, and similar qualities?

Why is there no heroine in *The Pilgrim's Progress*? If there is a villain in the story, who is he? How many things happen by introduction of the supernatural? Compare Bunyan's use of the supernatural with that in the *Aeneid*. Do any of the characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress* change before the close of the story? Compare these with changes in Sidney Carton, Silas Marner, Macbeth, and Ivanhoe. How does the ending of *The Pilgrim's Progress* compare with that of *Treasure Island* or *Robinson Crusoe* or the *Iliad*? Does a novelist usually allow a hero to succeed at the end in what he starts out to do? In how many novels does the hero die at the end? What influence may *The Pilgrim's Progress* have had upon Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Hawthorne? What, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, would have appealed especially to each of these novelists?

The most difficult task in connection with the study of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the discussion of its religious teaching; its interpretation of Puritanism, and its expression of the spiritual ardors of a man extraordinarily sensitive to the demands of his faith. Many people honestly think that in our schools, where all creeds are represented among pupils, there should be no discussion of religion at all. It seems a foolishly apprehensive view to take. Certainly our schools are not the place for carrying on religious propaganda (or any propaganda), but they are the place where young people should learn the facts of history and should be given some insight into the mighty struggles waged for the sake of religion. Is it not essential that every young American should know what a part Puritanism has had in shaping the character and ideals of our country? Our native stock and our foreign-born children should be acquainted with the great religious movement that helped colonize New England. Surely, they should know how passionate a protest against Episcopalianism Puritanism was, and how this protest developed when the Reformation had made England a Protestant country after centuries of Catholicism. Pupils who read *The Pilgrim's Progress* ought to review what they have learned in their histories of England and of America on this subject. A definition of Puritanism is difficult, but a teacher can usually gather together from a class sufficient suggestion to make the sub-

ject comparatively clear. Macaulay's *Naseby* may be read aloud, or bits from the *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*. A teacher who can keep the historical point of view distinct will not arouse antagonisms.

More delicate is the task of emphasizing the challenge in *The Pilgrim's Progress* to the inner life of readers. But, say some parents, young people ought not to think and talk about "the burden of sin"! Let them enjoy life without becoming morbid and introspective. Nobody who is at all acquainted with our athletic young will have much anxiety about morbidness in connection with them. As a matter of fact, they are, in this generation, singularly immature just because their devoted parents have so completely shielded them from knowledge of the hardships and troubles of human life. There is a very serious menace to our country in the absurd pampering of young people who ought to be learning the lessons of struggle, self-denial, and self-judgment. Bunyan is a wholesome tonic and irritant for that class of youths actually existing today, boys of seventeen who, clad in silk stockings and fine raiment, sit on a shady porch and *re-read* Mrs. Barclay's debilitating tales. Our young people need to be made to think about serious matters, and since so many homes cultivate selfishness and irresponsibility, the schools must act, if we are to have strong citizens alive to duty and obligation, quick to distinguish right from wrong, truth from falseness. The schools are supported by the state for the purpose of training good citizens. A good citizen must have a sound code of ethics, whether it be based upon the biblical commandments, old and new, or upon classical ideals of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. The teacher must give training in ideals.

Youth may, quite reasonably, discuss the burden of sin, harsh and startling as the suggestion sounds. Relatively, youth has as many sins as have older people, only we have indulgently called those sins by the name of blunders, forgetfulness, heedlessness, and ignorance. Youth, therefore, blandly assumes that sin is necessarily gross: lying, stealing, etc.; but is not the boy who cheats at football guilty of something more than heedlessness? Ought he not be made to recognize the truth of the fact? How many

children carry home "examples" which are night after night worked out by father or mother but handed in as done by the pupil? It is a poor teacher who cannot suggest to a class a dozen little iniquities that are fundamentally not truth, and therefore "sin." Is it not a good thing to discuss codes of morality, and is not *The Pilgrim's Progress* an excellent stimulant to the conscience? It will not hurt the young to scrutinize their own ideals, and it will not arouse a religious war to discuss in school the code of ethics by which civilized human beings try to live in homes and in communities. Let them discuss questions similar to these: What sins made up Christian's burden? What sins did he commit during his pilgrimage? Do we today call these sins? What do you think was the most serious sin he committed? Who are the worst sinners in the story? Are the following characters sinners: Obstinate, Pliable, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Mr. Money-love, By-ends, Ignorance? What virtues did Bunyan admire most? What did he think are the special sins of the judge, the juryman, the lawyer, the merchant? What helped Christian to learn the difference between right and wrong? Did his conscience grow more or less vigorous with use? How does a person best show repentance? Why did Bunyan despise "Talkers" who are not "Doers"? Who is responsible for a man's sins, himself or "fate"? The teacher cannot emphasize too impressively Bunyan's belief that the individual himself must initiate and continue the struggle against laziness, selfishness, cupidity, and other thronging dangers. He believed that the victory is with him that perseveres. The allegory teaches our softly nurtured young people that a righteous life is made up of loyalty, endurance, grim tenacity, and uncompromising truth, exalted always by indefinable, mystical yearning.